

Gosia: When was the last time you experienced catharsis?

Joanna: Oh ... hmmm I didn't prepare myself for such a question I have to ...think ..I understand the question, I'm just wondering and trying to dig out such a moment in my memory, because it's generally something I need in art, something I'm looking for, it's some kind of my idea of what an exhibition should be, that they don't leave (us in)... we don't leave them the same as we came in, but I have to say that it's been a long time since anything has moved me so much...

G: Really no film, no music, no theatrical performance?

J: Maybe now that I think back, the show "My Year of Relaxation and Rest" was a pretty cool and profound experience, but I don't think it's been a long time since I've been to a show that shook me or gave me a strong experience.

G: I recently experienced catharsis while watching the film "Ghosts of Inisherin"....

J: And it's true! A super film...

G: Did you get a chance to see it? I left (the cinema) feeling so changed....

J: I'll admit I didn't go to see this film in the cinema, just watched it (at home), so....

G: Well yeah, because it had already flown right into those platforms.

J: It probably wasn't the same, but yes it actually ... it gave me something, it did something to me....

G: And I realised to myself that I had to wait a very long time for this catharsis as far as contemporary art is concerned, and I wonder if contemporary art is still able to move us somehow? Somehow purify us? Give us emotions?

J: Yes, I'm sure it is, I think that's what we expect from art all the time - emotion and the fact that we change when we come into contact with this art, that something makes us think, moves us so much that it stays there somewhere. What I, for example, am also looking for, what I need, especially for these times, is also a sense of humour. That's something I like a lot. It's also very important to me in human relations, but it also has to be in art. I mean I'm looking for that, it's not a sine qua non, but a sense of humour, some lightness, a wink and some craziness, that's something I think I need in art now. What I expect now. Maybe in the context of the situation of reality that is around us, not only the political and social one, that this sense of humour and just magic..., so I'm moving a little bit smoothly here towards the exhibition, for example, the collaboration with Monster Chetwynd on the exhibition, on the

film, gave such a chance to immerse myself in such a magical world. To experience something really, while at the same time, just having that kind of wink and that kind of lightness that it just has.

G: Yes. I'm very glad you mentioned that, because I have the impression that it's very difficult today to find that sense of lightness above all in art. I'll come back to cinema for a moment, the first thing that comes to mind is the cinema of Wes Anderson. I say cinema because I think it's the closest to music for me, but I also think that this lightness also speaks in the exhibition 'There Will Be No Second Spring', after all...

J: Yes nevertheless, well also obviously the title itself sounds a bit disturbing and I kind of don't hide the fact that it's supposed to sound like that either. It was supposed to be a bit disturbing, it was supposed to shake us up a bit or put us on our guard and give us some food for thought. Certainly the (title) itself like the exhibition itself. Here a little interjection, because when I say, quoting the title of the exhibition, I am also reminded of people with whom I worked very closely on this exhibition. Here I would like to mention the name of Julia Harasimowicz, who is a specialist, a researcher, one of such important young researchers on the subject of childhood in Poland nowadays. This is the subject of her research, so this is where our interests meet, but coming back to the title - it is a bit threatening, a bit disturbing, but on the other hand it seems as if the art shown at the exhibition and the activities are lined (I am not saying that all the works are) with a certain sense of humour and lightness. And this I say especially about Monster Chetwynd, because 'Mr Blob's Academy' is just an inexhaustible source for me. That book in general...

G: But also the film!

J: Also the film, but also the book itself ...Just as I'm coming back to it now. It's a kind of inexhaustible source of interpretation, which can be read again and again, and I would also very much like a British artist to take an interest in this book, who admittedly has some connection with Poland, but is an outsider. And in fact, thanks to our cooperation, she had a chance to read the book in English, because she didn't know the book, she only knew Krzysztof Gradowski's film. I think it would be great (this is also my dream) if this book, which is probably one of the most extraordinary children's books in the history of Polish children's literature, could be circulated internationally, as it deserves to be. I'd like to do a little bit around it, so that there's a lot going on.

G: Before we move on to this, perhaps I would like to return to the catharsis we started our meeting with today - there is also a theme here (at the exhibition) that art helps to purge

emotions and I think that children who create art can also experience this catharsis. Only, of course, in a different way, in their own way, and they won't be as aware of it.

J: Exactly! That's definitely, that's one of the themes in the exhibition. A little of this thread is touched upon in the Room dedicated to the artist. Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, such an exceptional figure, that is to say, the theme of the broadly understood therapeutic aspect of art, creativity, its therapeutic function, also the theme of the use of art in pedagogical work is excellent, but also of the elaboration of various types of trauma. Clearly, this is how the protagonists of the Friedl Dicker-Brandeis exhibition worked in extreme circumstances, because she was in charge of Jewish children in Terezin, in other words, children who were constantly confronted with a sense of the proximity of death, in such a constant sense of danger and also dehumanisation. What they experienced was such a double dehumanisation that befell them as children, Jewish children. It seems to me that it is also in these actions of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis that such an extraordinary power of art is revealed. This is something that so restores our faith in art, so the activities that she carried out with them were also such a form of rescue for them, of saving their dignity, of restoring their own dignity. She was transforming these children's sense of agency. She gave them the opportunity to take their minds off what was going on around them. Without losing touch with this reality, but at the same time, it somehow allowed them to focus their thoughts on something completely different. This also shows that, for these children, art and artistic creation was also a way of coping with the most difficult emotions. Of course, this extreme context of war and this experience we are dealing with in the case of this artist. We have, for example, such an amazing installation by Eva Kotátková, which touches on issues that are very close to us now, issues that young children have to deal with on a daily basis. In fact, at school, or the various types of violence they experience. Art and artists provide some tools for dealing with these various, very difficult emotions, difficult situations. This is certainly also the function of theatre. Theatrical activities, which will serve and are serving the purpose of dealing with, for example, violence in various situations, will also be a part of our programme, so it seems to be, well, simply such an answer in this exhibition, which appears somewhere, that art gives us an answer and gives us tools that, perhaps, better than any other areas of knowledge, of science allow children or young people to deal with various situations.

G: As we can hear, there's a lot going on at the exhibition, there are also a lot of themes, in the context, of course, of art helping to educate, which is, in fact, an element of education. What I am interested in is how did you collect all these works? As a curator, what tone did you want to set? If it's also a question of collecting works from abroad, because we don't just

have Polish artists, but above all we have foreign artists - here comes Belgium, Spain (as far as I remember) and many other artists ...

J: It's a kind of a process, as with every exhibition ... simply, these types of projects, activities in which the artists are in some way or other interested in the subject of education and it is the main thread of their work, or works in which the artists invite children to participate in such cooperation and treat them as fully-fledged creators and participants in the creative process, so it was a kind of research from this angle. It was also more historical, but again Friedl Dicker-Brandeis was the starting point. It also stemmed from a collaboration (with Zacheta) that the Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz in Austria had with us. This is a museum that was preparing a very large, monographic exhibition of this artist. It was already some time ago. They invited us - Zachêta - to participate in this exhibition. I had been thinking about this exhibition for a long time and this topic was important for me, but when they came back to us with this proposal, it was also an additional impulse that we have such a nice foreign partner, we have this figure of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, with whom we can, of course, in a very modest selection of works, because this is a very small part of the exhibition which was in Linz, but show who she was in general. Even leaving aside her work, she was indeed a simply extraordinary woman. An extraordinary artist, but also simply an activist, an activist, politically engaged. Totally in the spirit of that time and also in the spirit of the Bauhaus, from which she came, from that environment - totally interdisciplinary - she did everything. I also wanted to show who she was in general, but the heart of this presentation is still the children's drawings and her collaboration with them. What she did there, which was quite extraordinary, that she created such a modern, progressive art school, in the middle of this hell. Also she was able to do something so extraordinary for those children there. There's also a film in the exhibition, I don't know if you've seen it, a film in poor quality nothing on VHS, but just showing...

G: Yes, on those telescopic TVs.

J: Yes, showing also the memories of those students who survived, and who also later emigrated to the United States, where they continued this tradition of art therapy and were inspired by this experience with Friedl Dicker-Brandeis,

G: There, from what I remember, I think there is a whole room dedicated to her. There was a sculpture with 3 colours arranged in a circle that moved ...

J: Let me correct you straight away, this is not her work. This is the work of a contemporary artist, but relating ...

G: That's also how we can see just the work of contemporary artists who refer to this science. To this science? Actually, I don't know if I should say that.

J: Just - methods. Yes, methods that combined what I think is very important and what is generally a kind of direction to follow all the time, that is, the activation of all the senses - interdisciplinary activities, activities developing various skills, working with various materials, and activating various senses in the creative process. This is what was very important in this pedagogical practice of the Bauhaus, but it is also something that has a long continuity and has continued in various activities throughout the 20th century, however, in the activities of artists who consciously referred to the achievements of the Bauhaus.

G: Surely there was a key you used as a curator ?

J: Of course, it's also the case that with such a broad subject, there's always this feeling that the exhibition could have been three times bigger, that you could have worked on it for years to come. It's simply always accompanied by the idea that we need to build a story, and not another story, in this particular space that we have at our disposal, so that it can be read, so that it is a continuous story. So that certain threads were somehow in dialogue with each other ... so, inevitably, certain things had to be cut off, or further research had to be done, but what seemed important to me was that, on the one hand, we have this historical context and this is, starting from the end of the exhibition and this is the context for the activities of, for example, this Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, we go back to the beginning or the 1920s and we look at very progressive activities, practices of artists originating from the Bauhaus, but not only that. Then we show such a context throughout the 20th century - various references to some of their activities and actions that were also undertaken in very different circumstances. For example, we mention artists who worked within the educational and political system, above all in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, but who nevertheless tried to break that system (to put it bluntly) from within. I would like to mention a couple of figures who are key to the modern way of thinking about children and education, such as the progressive trend in France, i.e. the whole trend of the Frene schools founded by Celestin and Eliz Frenet, which is also a very long and important tradition of a very modern, alternative way of thinking about education without textbooks, based on experimentation, developing creativity and various forms of expression. On the other hand, there was a figure that I really wanted to mention, because she seemed to me to be relatively unknown in Poland, and well-known in France, but here it seemed to me that she wasn't at all, and she was worth mentioning because of her pioneering thinking and approach to working with children, or young people, who were generally marginalised for various reasons, or because of various kinds of misadaptation, but, among other things, a very pioneering approach to children on the autism spectrum, or

autistic children, children who do not use speech at all, well, this also seemed to me to be a very interesting practice that was worth mentioning, perhaps also combining his pedagogical experience as an educator, but also his artistic film practice. (talking about Frene)

G: There is also the theme of education. A different education for boys and a different education for girls...

J: Yes, there is this theme of a very interesting figure that we are evoking here - Jef Geys, a conceptual artist, but who above all became famous (in the context of the exhibition evoked) for his incredible activity in such a tiny town, where he simply ran art classes in a school for girls. The exhibition features the well-known "100 questions to women" - a set of different questions in which he simply formulated on the basis of a certain image of women that was emerging from the Belgian popular press at the time. He gave food for thought in various ways, provoked discussion and collaborated with these students on very different levels. They created art galleries together, created different works of course, and all the time this art and these art classes were a pretext for such thinking and also for some different emancipatory activities. Here art reveals itself as such a very important tool for emancipation, or in these activities. (Now I'm walking through the various elements of the exhibition) I'm also reminded of Anna Asylum, a theatre educator who worked with homeless children - street children - with whom she created amazing things. It was completely pioneering thinking. It wasn't children's theatre. It was actually children's theatre in which they were co-creators. They didn't create the performance, because it was just (they were) acting rather based on improvisation, on play, and it was real theatre, created by them. Not according to some script or according to her directives, so it was (well I can only imagine) for these children it was something that was in some way formative. What I really liked, and what was so pioneering incredibly, was also her thinking about it. There was a question that she and Walter Benjamin asked together: "And actually why not replace school with theatre? Why shouldn't theatre be such a space, such a place where they learn, where they assimilate knowledge about themselves, about the world ... and these are the kind of questions we can ask ourselves, or we ask ourselves when we walk around the exhibition...."

G: Well, yes, I'm curious to what extent it would pass the test - for example, in our country - would a school in the form of a theatre actually work?

J: Well, you know, thinking more in terms of a minimum programme, let's introduce theatre with a capital T into education, simply. I'm not saying replace school with theatre, but let's at least make theatre part of education. Let's make artistic activities, which develop creativity, regardless of the so-called 'talent', a real part of education, and not a marginal subject, an addition to other core subjects.

G: Asia, I really want to take advantage of the fact that we can see each other and have a chance to talk, because I'm very curious to know by what do you recognise that an exhibition is just good?

J: That's a difficult question. Well, I have a number of criteria that would be important... It also depends on which exhibitions we're talking about, but as I said, it's what I need, that is, what I'm looking for, because everyone probably looks for something a bit different... We have different expectations of different types of exhibitions. I like exhibitions which are intellectually stimulating in one way, through which I learn something, that is, with a message, which are interesting - they make me curious, but no less important for me is this experience of acting on my emotions, on my senses... and this is something I really need at an exhibition. I also think it's good when an exhibition is also a story. When an exhibition has some kind of drama, how it guides us and allows us to experience different emotions too. Does this exhibition fulfil this criterion? It's probably not for me to judge. I tried to make it so, but as I say, when I go to an exhibition that's what I would really like - for there to be both an experience and a purely emotional, sensual experience, but it's also important what we learn in such a purely intellectual experience.

G: I'm curious what you'll think about what I'm going to say in a moment, because I realised that this exhibition has a lot to do with your work, because you, as a curator, have to make sure that you educate the viewers, in inverted commas, in a particular subject. To bring them closer, at least to encourage them to reflect on a particular subject... well here it's about making this art work for the viewer, and you have to package it in such a way that the message is just clear. In the same way, this exhibition is about education through art.

J: The message has to be clear, but it doesn't have to be....

G: Not literal.

J: Well, that's exactly right. That's how I always assume and count on that viewer of ours. I think also we should always raise the bar though. I mean, don't assume that everyone knows everything, but if everyone doesn't know everything, well then the exhibition is something that everyone, regardless of age, can just watch and also experience at different levels. In that sense I think this exhibition is also with a message for adults, for us, but I hope it is with a message for people of different ages from 4 to 15, it can be interesting for other reasons, very different reasons. Just as each of us (even adults) view exhibitions differently, so probably each of the viewers regardless of age, whether it's just a 4 year old that is, some knowledge even about someone may not have, but they are experiencing and going their own path. This is our idea of viewing this exhibition. We also want to prepare such audio

guides. Guides that would be recorded by different people, of different ages, different categories, just to see a bit of the exhibition, the works, or maybe not the works, or maybe something else in the exhibition space...

G: What will be born there? What I really liked about the exhibition was the room that I come back to every time I think about it, as we talk about it, and we're talking about the exhibition 'There Will Be No Second Spring' to the Room where there's an overturned school bench and all the chairs that we would have pushed up to those benches are also in some kind of anarchy and are scattered all over the Room. I like it because it reminds me of a teenage rebellion, where we used to scribble on these desks, and here we have beautiful drawings in these chairs, we don't have some ugly inscriptions scratched out with a pen or pencil, but we have beautiful bas-reliefs? Can you say that?

J: Yes, the engraved images... This installation can probably also be read in many different ways and it's nice that it's at the heart of the exhibition, at the intersection of different paths. Firstly, it also makes interesting historical references to the oldest, most distant figures in history. It presents such modern education, it refers to the founder of the Catalan Modern School. You mentioned anarchy and this is a reference to the activities of the Catalan anarchist and educator Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia. He created a school that was very progressive at the time, because it was co-educational and, above all, what was the main purpose of it was to form such civic attitudes and some such radical social views. This is how he understood the role of school, that it was first and foremost a preparation for social life, and it was also a secular education. This was also an important element of his as postulates, so on the one hand, this whole installation is a reference to his history, to his conception and such an attempt to answer the question: "What function would art have in this Modern School? What role should art have in education today?". And the installation itself is just evoking different such associations, different connotations, because I think to myself that, well, that's how we dealt with this boredom, some kind of oppressive experience of sitting in a school desk. We have found that many pupils are looking for an outlet for their energy and their need for creativity through drawing, nervous sketching, hollowing something out on the bench or in a chair, etc., etc...

G: Do I have an impression or have you remembered something ? How did you do that yourself?

J: Well drawing on the bench...or on the desk.... it was, of course, sort of with this kind of constant practice, but I think of it as a reference to this oppressive school architecture too. I think it's, to this concept that our system is based on all the time, that is, disciplining the body, taming and just rather suppressing the hordes of bodily expression, verbal

expression... it's always necessary to sit upright, it's necessary to be quiet, generally it's like an essential part of education too, it's just a total denial of what the human organism really needs.

G: For all intents and purposes, we as adults are also not able to concentrate at work sometimes for 45 minutes and not say a word to a colleague or a friend. Just to focus on writing a dozen emails. It's very difficult, I'm experiencing it myself and I think it's a doable thing, just - to sit up straight for 45 minutes and not say anything...

J: Now I think of it as something terrible! I happened to be the kind of person who gave in easily to the system. I tended to be very polite and disciplined and a Friday person, but I don't think it was good for me... a lot of children or young people for whom it's just really an ordeal - it's sitting still and not moving and learning in a position that's so immobile and uncomfortable and

G: On a hard chair....

J: On a hard chair, it just goes against some nature.... so that's kind of the basic idea that comes to mind already - overturned chairs.

G: So is there any chance of things changing then ?

J: It was also the kind of thing that motivated me. I'm not crazy either. I realise that the impact of the exhibition is, in a way, very small... After all, it's a very narrow group that the exhibition or its message will reach. I don't have that much power here, but somewhere the thought crossed my mind that it has to be done, that even if it doesn't have such a big reach, it will provoke somewhere or it will be a starting point for various discussions, meetings, talks, that at this point the only thing we can do are these various activities, grass-roots activities, small gestures, because I think that at this point it is not up to me what the whole education system will look like, but we can do such things. First of all, we can try to work out some activities or programmes which may start to appear in schools. For example, these are grassroots activities, open discussion...

G: And here I think it's all in the hands of the public schools, it seems to me a bit, because I hear more and more often among my friends that they choose schools that focus on this kind of development - through art, through not sitting rigidly in desks, but freely in a circle, activities, conversations... and I have the impression that this is becoming a kind of luxury, because unfortunately we have to pay for it...

J: And that's what worries me, that unfortunately, like Montessori schools, well this is unfortunately a luxury that is reserved for a very narrow group though, for the elite, and as if that's not a solution right? However, one would like democratic access to such real, modern education... This gap, this economic gap, between schools, between those children who attend state schools, which are still in the 19th century system, let's be honest. Yes, this school system, it is all the time based on the 19th century hierarchy of subjects and hierarchy in general. And on the other hand, we have public schools, often very expensive and inaccessible for financial reasons for the majority, where indeed these certain alternative concepts are implemented, but that's not the point ...

G: We don't mean that there should be extra-curricular activities where a child can develop, we mean that there should be a programme in schools so that we can develop these young people and these children ...

J: I think this programme needs to be completely reformed and completely changed. It needs to be a programme that adapts and tries to catch up with that reality, because we are way behind that reality already, right? This school system, as it looks now, is nowhere near this reality.

G: There are still activities to come to accompany the whole exhibition and here Asia was already very excited.

J: Yes, because it's very important. There is an exhibition which is something closed, but when I was making this exhibition I also thought about it as a space which will be a living space, and I think we've put a lot of work into it and the whole education department is very bravely involved in it (in this programme), but it's very intensive and I think there will be a lot of workshops. They (the workshops) are mainly aimed at the youngest, and while the exhibition itself has a message for adults, it is meant to make them think, there will be various activities with artists, the closest being Olivia Blender, a Swedish-British artist, or Sebastian Ronsere - film workshops, activities on old films, or workshops with Jenny Brockman (also next week). There will also be scientific conferences, this is for adults more, but at the same time we have activities aimed at children. We also definitely have two very cool events during the exhibition. These are two such groups, two artist collectives from Romania, Min Tremu and the Spanish collective Pedagogica Inseparables, which we are bringing in thanks to the Cervantes Institute, and these will be wonderful workshops for children, including children on the autism spectrum. Both collectives are really artists who work simply in the field of education is their main area, so we will see what they will also prepare for us here at the exhibition. Theatre21 will be active in the exhibition space, there

will be performances of 'Trolls and Walls'... well, and I also have to say, because we discussed this, that I will use here....

G: Yes, yes, Paweł Althamer... We are waiting for this icing on the cake, because Paweł is famous here for these amazing projects, he does such an experiment a bit on different local communities, so I am curious what will he prepare this time...?

J: This project we are creating now and I hope it will be soon, at the end of April, its inauguration. The project is a collaboration between Zachęta and the Centre for Inclusive Art from the Prague Museum and, above all, the Warsaw Zoo. It will be an island. Warsaw has its own island and it will have an even more beautiful one, maybe I will just say for now that we will be operating on an island, this island will be an important place in Praga, but I hope not only. It will also be an important place on the artistic map of Warsaw, a place of respite, a place of rest, a place of silence, meditation, concentration, but also various activities. For example, around such other forms of non-verbal communication. We will be learning sign language and many other activities. There will also be a variety of activities, far beyond the Zachęta space, but in some way related to it, to the theme of the exhibition. It will certainly be mainly May, June and, I hope, July. There is a space that is newly opening up - a bit magical....

G: What is the exhibition 'There Will Be No Second Spring' for you? Already ending slowly our meeting today.... So far, 20th century art, the post-war period, here the paintings of Andrzej Wróblewski in particular. Well, and here comes the educational theme, the children's theme....

J: This children's theme has certainly also appeared in other exhibitions. For example, there was the exhibition The Future Will Be Different. It was an exhibition mainly about such progressive social artistic ideas that were born in the 20 years between the wars in Poland. Of course, there, necessarily, this modern pedagogy was also a very important theme in that exhibition. It also featured in a couple of other exhibitions. There was an exhibition on puppet theatre and the use of the puppet as a pedagogical tool or an educational tool. There was also an exhibition connected with the idea of folklore and the activities of artists referring to children's art, understood as the 'art of the other'. On the one hand, these are interests from the areas of art history, cultural history, but on the other hand, there is also simply, there is life. Exhibitions also spring from some of my own needs and experiences, and I think that's when they are so very real and honest, so this exhibition is also the result of my various experiences as a mum who also struggles with the education system, and not always with success. It is the result of a very difficult experience with a child who is perhaps a little bit different, who does not easily fit into a scheme, who does not easily give in to the system,

who is a little bit like Adaś Niezgodzki. My experiences as a mum of Adas Niegódka also made me interested in this subject. It is all very close to me.

G: And the creation of this giant sculpture and film, among other things

J: Well yes, it is (in this exhibition) a beloved child ...

G: Did you feel a sense of catharsis as a curator then in creating this exhibition?

J: Well I think it was a really unique experience. Probably more important than previous ones, because that's what was great about it - the experience of working on a film, well, and here there's this sense that art is a lifesaver in the worst of some different situations.

G: And a recipe for all evil. Joanna Kordjak - art historian, curator at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art was with us today - thank you very much for this conversation. Of course, I don't think I need to encourage you to visit Zachęta and see the exhibition 'There will be no Second Spring'.

Translated by Aleksandra Sioda